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CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY

Written statement submitted by Christian Solidarity International, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 July 1998]

GE.98-13186 (E)

Slavery in the Sudan

1. Christian Solidarity International (CSI) submits the present statement on the basis of over 20 fact-finding visits to "no-go" areas in northern, central and southern Sudan since 1992, the most recent from 11 to 19 June 1998. CSI received various unconfirmed reports of the continuing practice of slavery on visits to the Sudan between 1992 and 1994, but it was not until a brief visit to Nyamlell in May 1995 that we discovered that slavery was a flourishing and widespread institution. During many fact-finding missions, we have interviewed slaves, slave traders and Popular Defence Force (PDF) officers, and have accumulated an abundance of evidence to prove, beyond any reasonable doubt, that chattel slavery thrives in Darfur and Kordofan and exists elsewhere in northern Sudan, including the capital, Khartoum, and that the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime actively encourages it.

2. Raiding for slaves in northern Bahr El Ghazal has undergone a great revival in the 1980s and 1990s. After the NIF seized power in 1989 the raids were organized by the central Government and have become far more systematic, widespread and devastating than hitherto. The number of chattel slaves is estimated to be in the tens of thousands. The slaves can be bought and sold freely.

3. The raiders are normally mobilized by the PDF which was established in 1991 as a special branch of the Sudanese military to function under the direct operational control of the NIF. PDF officers recruit Rizeiqat and Misiriyah nomads living in southern Darfur and southern Kordofan to fight in the NIF's jihad against their "infidel" neighbours - i.e. the Christian and animist Dinkas of northern Bahr El Ghazal. The slave raids are just one of many instruments of war used by the NIF to uproot ethnic and religious communities.

4. The Dinka community has been identified as a special target for destruction by the NIF because of its stiff resistance to the regime's totalitarian policies, including forced Islamization and Arabization. According to the NIF's ideology of jihad, members of this resistant black African community, be they men, women or children, are entirely outside the law, and may be arbitrarily killed, enslaved, looted or otherwise abused. The raids are accompanied by atrocities, such as murder, torture, rape and looting.

5. The NIF recruiters entice nomads to participate in this violent jihad by emphasizing both the spiritual rewards - i.e. paradise in case of death - and the material rewards - i.e. booty in the form of slaves, cattle and grain, and any other movable property of the victims. As reported by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sudan, Mr. Gáspár Biró, religious leaders in Kordofan, "publicly supported at the highest governmental level", issued a fatwa in April 1992 which states: "An insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate; and a non-Muslim is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam and Islam has granted the freedom of killing both of them" (E/CN.4/1996/62, para. 97 (a)).

6. The slave raids normally take place during the dry season (November to April) when the PDF is able to move quickly on the ground and escape quickly from pursuing contingents of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Many of the raids are conducted in conjunction with the movements of the regime's military train which travels several times a year between Khartoum and Wau. The NIF uses the PDF raiders to guard the train as it inches slowly up and down the line. When they reach the borderland areas, they customarily fan out from the railway line and raid villages for slaves and other booty.

7. The raiders tend to capture women and children from the age of five as slaves, although younger children still in their mothers arms are also enslaved. The women slaves are made to carry on their heads and backs the booty of their captors. Some slaves will remain in the north with their captors, while others are sold to new owners. Most boy slaves are made to tend cows and goats. Most girls and young women have to perform domestic labour, such as cleaning, grinding grain, and fetching firewood and water. Many of the girls and young women are sexually abused by their masters. Most of the slaves are forced by their masters to change their cultural identity and become Muslims. This involves receiving a Muslim name and having to perform Islamic rituals. Many boy slaves are circumcised when they come of age. Many girls and women are subjected to ritual genital mutilation. Severe beatings are the norm when a slave displeases his or her master.

8. Since October 1995 when CSI began to redeem women and children from slavery, our redemption programme has resulted in the freeing of over 2,400 slaves. CSI redeems slaves within the framework of longstanding local peace agreements between Dinka chiefs and Arab traders and clan leaders. These agreements call on the Rizeiqat and Misiriyah co-signatories to facilitate the return of slaves from the north. The price paid by CSI for freeing a slave is fixed within the terms of the agreements - i.e. 50,000 Sudanese pounds (about $50). The northern traders who bring the slaves back to the south are known and trusted by the Dinka community leaders. In some cases, the slaves are bought from their masters. In others, jealous wives of slave owners conspire with traders to effect the escape of slave women and girls who are used as concubines by their husbands. The slaves cannot be released free of charge as the traders incur substantial costs. Because these traders are helping the Dinka community and are supporting the local peace agreements, they are on a wanted list and would be killed or imprisoned if caught. One trader who has cooperated with CSI's slave redemption activity had his house burned down by NIF security officers and his family now lives in hiding. CSI's involvement in slave redemption has not resulted in any inflation of the price of a slave, nor is there any evidence to suggest that slavery has increased because of this humanitarian policy.

9. In his final report (E/CN.4/1998/66), Mr. Biró referred in section IV to "Slavery, servitude, the slave trade, forced labour and similar institutions and practices". Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/67 also refers to the issue of slavery.

10. For a long time, the NIF refused access to the United Nations and NGOs in many areas controlled and administered by the country's pro-democracy movement. The areas most severely affected by this policy are northern Bahr El Ghazal, Nuba mountains, the southern Blue Nile, the areas around Juba,

and Kassala and Red Sea Provinces. Aside from slavery, the United Nations agencies have been aware for many months that a famine was approaching in Bahr El Ghazal. CSI drew attention to the famine in the making and the "death magnet" that had been created at Pakor in our March 1998 Sudan trip report. The outgoing United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sudan, Mr. Biró, reported to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 16 April that "hundreds of thousands of people are starving in southern Sudan". He estimated that within one year, "some 1.6 million people could face famine". Since then the situation has worsened. Unless the international community - beginning with the Sub-Commission - intervenes effectively to render the NIF incapable of prosecuting its genocidal jihad, which includes slavery, and denies it the right to prevent emergency aid from reaching those in need, it is likely the death toll will rise in line with Mr. Biró's estimates, and the Sudan will continue to be a whirlpool, devouring many millions of dollars of humanitarian aid while slavery continues to claim more and more victims.

11. The Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has defined slavery as a "crime against humanity". That "crime against humanity" is not just an evil of the past. This aspect of the ongoing African massacres has been well documented by many, including CSI and Mr. Biró.

12. Article II (e) of the 1948 Genocide Convention ("Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group") covers child slavery, which is being carried out systematically in the Sudan. It is punishable under articles III and IV.

13. CSI urges the Sub-Commission - as it has the Commission - to call for the establishment of a UNICEF-sponsored slave tracing programme to locate and facilitate the return of slaves to their families.